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ABSTRACT

A handbook of practical advice is offered to adult women who are re-entering undergraduate and graduate programs at Northwestern University and similar institutions of higher education. Interviews with 60 "re-entry women" provide helpful suggestions for organizing time inside and outside the university while balancing other relationships and responsibilities with academic demands. The majority of re-entry women manage a household and care for a family while pursuing a university career. Priorities often need to be reshuffled when adult women return to the university, and time management techniques become crucial in negotiating compromises with husbands, children, friends and relatives. Within the university, adult women students can find useful information on selecting classes, university publications, faculty advice, student responses, scheduling classes, registration, study habits, career counseling, financial aid, discrimination, and relationships with students and faculty. The text is sprinkled with sections titled NU NOTES, which offer practical details specific to the Northwestern University campus. A brief final section on "Making the System Work For You" counsels adult women students to seek help and advice from professors and younger students rather than feeling isolated because of their age. A short bibliography is included. (DC)

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RE-ENTRY:

A HANDBOOK FOR ADULT WOMEN STUDENTS

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The Program on Women
Northwestern University
Evanston, Illinois

October, 1979

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This handbook is based on research conducted by the Program on Women at Northwestern University made possible by grants from the National Institute of Education and the Hummel Foundation of the Chicago Community Trust.

The information it presents is derived in part from interviews with sixty re-entry women enrolled as undergraduate and graduate students at Northwestern. The advice gathered from their experiences will therefore be especially useful for re-entry students at similar universities -- designed for 18-to-22-year-old students and lacking structured programs for adults.

The handbook is designed to assist re-entry women in general and those at Northwestern in particular. The main body of the text provides general information; sections titled NU NOTES offer practical details specific to the Northwestern campus. The NU NOTES, however, can be useful for all readers since they will suggest what information and services to look for on any campus or in any community.

The author is grateful to the women who agreed to be interviewed about their experiences, to faculty and administrators who provided information and perspectives, and to Arlene Kaplan Daniels, Esther Benjamin, Judith Levy, Jan Zimmerman, Sybil Bolotin, Ellen Frank and Daire Kalmes of the Program on Women.

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INTRODUCTION

Re-entry women students, like many adults engaged in more than one activity, find they must order their priorities and organize their time. They must squeeze classes and study time into an already full and busy life. The majority of re-entry women manage a household and care for a family while they pursue a university education. Those without husbands and children must balance other personal relationships and responsibilities with academic demands. It takes skill, ingenuity, and perseverance to manage both at the same time without slighting either. But, as the experiences described in this handbook prove, it can be done.

In the past, each re-entry woman had to learn the ropes on her own--how to get information, how to select classes, how to study. Now you can benefit from their experience. It can help you succeed in a university designed for students who have just graduated from high school. And it can show you how some women have reconciled personal commitments with university responsibilities.

The experiences of the re-entry women described in this handbook offer many insights and suggestions. There are descriptions of women's lives so that you know what you can expect yours to look like. Difficult situations are discussed so you can recognize them should they arise and be able to avoid or manage them. These women offer practical suggestions to improve your life both off and on campus.

Although problems described by re-entry women may seem overwhelming, remember that they have been gathered from the experiences of a variety of women. No one individual will experience all of them. Select the advice that suits your own needs. Keep in mind that the women who faced these situations are also the ones who will assure you that the personal satisfactions of pursuing an education far outweigh the obstacles.

Life Outside the University

Priorities. As a woman returning to school you will find yourself re-ordering your priorities to reflect your changing interests and the new demands on your time. You will probably find yourself following the example of other re-entry women who place academic requirements and personal responsibilities at the top of their list of priorities. As a thirty-five-year-old student, mother of two children explains, "It's grades, kids, and husband, and everything else has to fall in between."

Time Management. Because of your two sets of commitments -- home and family and academic studies -- you may find that there are not enough hours in the day to accomplish everything you have to do.

Because you will not have much unfilled time, you may find it necessary to eliminate some activities and lower your standards for others.

You may be able to resume some of these activities once you become adjusted to your new schedule. One re-entry woman told of giving up her hobbies in the first year to manage family and academic tasks. In the second year she found time for them again.

Other pastimes for which you are too busy may simply lose your interest. For example, a re-entry student pointed out that, "You have to give up things like your two hours at Nieman Marcus." But you will probably discover, as many women have, that eliminating activities is not always a sacrifice; as your interests change, former pastimes may no longer seem so important.

You may also add extra hours to your day by going to bed later or getting up earlier. In addition, re-entry women have become very adept at making every minute of the day count, and sometimes count twice. Re-entry women have learned the art of doing two things at once, creating situations where they can combine their roles as wife, mother, homemaker, friend, and student. Part of their success is based on good organization and planning, delegation of authority, and simplification of tasks. Another way to stretch those few extra minutes is habitually to carry note cards, a pencil and a textbook whenever you are going someplace where you might have a few free minutes.

You will quickly find that housework begins to lose its importance. Household activities will be relegated to the bits of time left after meeting academic demands and family needs. Many women manage by doing less housework and doing it less thoroughly.

Here's how a thirty-seven-year-old re-entry student with two children described the changes in her life after she returned to school. "I'm certainly less fastidious now. Having the bathroom not washed down doesn't bother me like it used to. My husband helps with the shopping and the cooking, but it's clear that some things lose their importance, such as your social life or whether or not the beds are made. Instead of parties, I meet friends for lunch and I really like it better that way. I used to spend the day doing the laundry. Now I stick it in the washer at night. What used to be a full-time job became a very small unimportant part of my day."

You can simplify many household tasks as other re-entry women have. Use paper plates; make less elaborate meals. Buy cookies instead of baking them; use mixes.

Identify tasks that can be done by others. Delegate some household responsibilities to family members, and then if necessary and possible, hire outside help. Just remember that for all tasks you assign, you will still have to do some prodding and supervising to

see they get done. If you have babysitters, have them do other things; they can run errands, take a child for a haircut, pick out a present when a child is invited to a birthday party. If money permits, call in a housecleaning service, use a caterer, or take guests out to dinner.

Time Organization. Every woman has had some experience in organizing her time, and that of her family. When you return to school, careful scheduling becomes more crucial. As a thirty-five-year-old mother of two pointed out, she used to "juggle her schedule at her own convenience." But when she returned to school she became more organized because scheduled classes and deadlines left less time for flexibility.

First you should try to identify what you think is essential so you don't feel you are short-changing either your family or your coursework. Once you have determined the givens, you should try to write them into a feasible schedule. With advance planning, you can avoid time conflicts. You won't want to schedule other activities when assignments or exams come up. Schedule medical appointments, entertaining, and major shopping trips after midterms and during breaks. Try to keep large blocks of time free for study, and learn to use little pieces of time effectively. Check the calendar for birthdays, children's vacation days that don't coincide with yours, and children's school activities (open house, recitals, conferences) and essential social engagements so you can have time for them or arrange someone to fill in for you. Re-entry students admit they lose spontaneity with such tight planning, but it alleviates some of the stress caused by the conflicting demands on their time.

Women find that even the best laid plans can fail. You should have in mind back-up arrangements for some emergencies, but others you simply cannot foresee. As a mother of two says, referring to children's illnesses, "You have to be flexible, don't you? Even if you have a test that day and you can't make it, well, you just can't die. You can always make-up a test. Teachers really have been very good about understanding."

Datebooks and Notebooks. It is important to write everything down: appointments, errands, deadlines. Keep a notebook in your kitchen and in your purse to jot down ideas for your schoolwork as well as for things you must do. Making lists helps to unclutter your mind. Keep a calendar by day, by week and by month. One woman carried a datebook with each day charted from seven in the morning until eight-thirty at night. As she said, "The rigors of just carrying everything mentally can be a problem." Another keeps a calendar two or three months in advance to find enough time for all her friends.

One woman advised being clear about your priorities: "I take one thing at a time, unless I have priorities and these are not always schoolwork. It may be taking a child to the dentist instead of reading ten more pages. You have to come to grips with your priorities. Somehow things will work out if you do them one by one. First you determine what you have to do and what you can do, then you do the first, then the second and then the third. You can't feel guilty. You must realize that you can only do so much and then have to stop."

A thirty-two-year-old mother of two offered some practical tips for using time efficiently. "I use a pressure cooker a lot. We eat more fast meals. I cook in big batches. I've learned to put a load of laundry in when I go out. I throw it into the dryer when I come home. Also, a major thing is that I've learned what chores I can do when people are home. When the children go out skiing down at school in the afternoons I'll quickly sit down and start studying. When they come home then I'll be cooking dinner or make a bed because I can talk to them while I do it."

Family. The people with whom you live will be most affected by the changes in your daily life after your return to school. To avoid neglecting them you must be sure to devote some time to each one, alone and collectively. Part of this time together can be for simply enjoying each other and for sharing interests and concerns; other time together can be focussed on involving them in your new activities.

Despite your efforts, your husband and children may have mixed feelings about your academic commitments. Re-entry women praised the support and encouragement they received from their husbands, and others noticed increased respect from them. A husband's support may waver, however, when he realizes how time-consuming academic life can be.

Children who have enjoyed their mother's undivided attention are likely to resent these new claims on her time. But they are also likely to feel proud of their mothers. The situation of a mother who has two boys and a younger daughter illustrates both reactions. "The boys are very interested in what I'm doing and they really are very supportive. They want me to keep going. They are proud of me." But she continues, "I can't say my daughter is. Maybe she's just younger. In the beginning she thought of it as less time with mommy. She had all the time before."

It takes time for a family to adjust to a major change in one member's life. To help everyone through this initial time of change, re-entry women repeatedly emphasized the necessity of honest discussion with husbands and children. A student whose husband was very pleased with her returning to school, said it was "more time-consuming than he expected. He felt somewhat left out, but everyone has a period of adjustment." She continued, "The first year that I came back he found out that I couldn't just pick up and run to a show,

or take off for the weekend with the family. He was a little disappointed. He had to learn how to entertain himself; to depend on his own resources." And she helped him by suggesting how he could entertain himself.

Many mothers stressed the importance of talking to their children, and explaining to them that less time does not mean less love. The mother of three mentioned above remembers having to tell her daughter, "I wish I could spend more time with you like we did before, but I have a test to take."

In addition to keeping communication lines open, it is a good idea to try to involve your family in your academic life. Including your husband in academic and campus activities that interest both of you will give you more to share. You may want to bring him to films or lectures on campus or include him in social activities. Husbands can read a paper or help with a math problem or simply discuss class topics with you. Many women discovered that conversations with their husbands became more interesting after their return to school. A re-entry woman described how her husband's attitude toward her had changed for the better since she had continued her education: "He now sees me as less of something in his house and more as someone who is with him in his life."

To compensate for their inability to give their children what one student called "that underfoot attention," some women studied at home in order to be at least physically present for their children. And, many mothers try to include their children in their academic life. A mother of three children found ways of involving them in her work. As she says, "My daughter loves to help me study and that probably resolves part of the problem. She asks me questions or tests me on my Spanish vocabulary. As long as she's with me, it helps me too." Her older boys also participated: "The boys read my papers. Quite often what I was doing in school applied to them. We had more to talk about in that sense; schoolwork, homework. We used to study together in the kitchen at night." Another woman who was assigned Rip Van Winkle for one of her classes read it aloud to her children. Many re-entry women observed that a mother who studies is a positive role model for her children.

Other women who wanted their children to participate in their academic life brought them to campus for films, concerts, or other activities. And one woman bought university-labeled souvenirs (tee shirts, sweatshirts, and bookbags, for example) as birthday gifts for her children. In these ways re-entry women try to bring their two worlds together.

Husbands. You must find ways to nourish your relationship with your husband in spite of your busy schedule. Many women have found it useful to establish a certain time to spend together. Some did

so casually. As one said, "We usually spend time together when he comes home, while I'm cooking. We always find time for that. It's important to us, no matter how much we have to do." Others arranged more formal "dates" regularly to guarantee shared leisure time. And, finally, many emphasized the importance of small gestures to keep in touch -- back rubs, favorite foods, special favors.

Regardless of the compromise you reach, you may feel unhappy about "neglecting" your husband. One woman described this situation; "He did get upset when I had to study and he was free. It bothered both of us. We'd make compromises about it. I would do my work and then spend time with him. But I often felt guilty." These feelings may disappear as you both become adjusted to your new routines. And, it may help to remember that it is the quality, not the quantity, of your time together that satisfies.

Because much of a re-entry woman's time is spent in study, husbands often take on added household and family responsibilities, like cooking, shopping, and spending time with the children. Many women emphasized that father taking children on outings, especially on the weekends, benefitted everyone; it gave them time to study, and it improved relations between fathers and children. Many women mentioned that their husbands had learned to be better fathers.

Their wives' return to school presaged a welcome independence to some husbands. The knowledge that a wife's education will allow her to provide financial support for the family gave them a sense of security. One woman described her husband's feeling: "He wants me to get a job some day so he can retire and I can go to work. I don't think he thought I would be capable of supporting us. It's a real comfort to him."

With so many changes to manage, some couples have found that they are not able to make the adjustment on their own. They have sought help from marriage counselors to work out their difficulties. Check with the university student health service if you want to seek assistance.

NU NOTE: Marital counseling is available at Searle through the Mental Health Service; 869-8100.

Children. Because children are often used to being with their mothers most of the day, they may find it difficult to give her up to school. A mother of two children, ages five and nine, explained that before she went back to school she was always accessible. "The time I spent with them was intertwined all through the day." But now, because she has to study, she often has to say, "You'll have to wait." Children of course do not let these changes go unnoticed. A re-entry woman who has three children recalls their complaints. "Sometimes my older daughter, the fourteen-year-old, reads

magazines to me that say, 'Dear So-and-So, My mother isn't paying enough attention to me,' or something like that. And my youngest is getting to be like Sarah Bernhardt; her acting skills are incredible." But she adds, "I just don't feel that their complaints are well-grounded." Another mother said she felt guilty when her son started eating lunch at school. But she managed to cope with her feelings. As she said, "I had my sights set on the future; it got me through. I had tunnel vision and blinders."

These mothers also attempted to make up in quality what they couldn't give in quantity. One woman with two children ages twelve and fifteen recognized the importance of giving each child individual attention and turned a necessary chore into a special occasion to do so. When shopping for clothes she said, "I found it easiest to take one of my children shopping about four o'clock, leaving the other one home with my husband to fix dinner and clean up. Then I would eat out with the other one while I shopped." This way, she noted, it was not such a chore; the child received special attention because they were alone for dinner together and they also got the necessary clothes. She added that it was a break for her too.

Spending less time with children, as one woman pointed out, can actually have a positive effect on their development. Before returning to school she found herself concentrating too much time and energy supervising her children. Now, she says, "I think they're learning to stand a bit on their own two feet. I don't have to remind them of things. Now they have to be more responsible." Other re-entry women agree that you can expect your children to rise to the occasion; they are capable of assuming much more responsibility than suspected, and are often proud to do so. So don't hesitate to delegate household chores to children of almost any age; straightening up their room, washing or folding laundry, or helping in the kitchen. One mother of two children says, "I've allocated tasks to the kids and they've been very cooperative." Her son puts the dishes in the dishwasher and her daughter takes them out.

Re-entry women also suggest that children can take more responsibility for their after-school activities. Rather than counting on their mother to drive them, they can learn to get around on their own: on foot, by bicycle, or using public transportation. In emergency cases even a taxi can fill in.

An added bonus many re-entry women mention is the respect they gain from their children in the long run. A mother of two children, ages five and seven, explains: "They start to realize that the whole world doesn't revolve around them and they start to respect you as an individual." She says they also have more concern for others. "I've seen that in both my kids and I think it's a good experience. They'll say 'Oh Mommy, you're so tired, take it easy.' My son, who is seven years old, will bring me a cup of tea sometimes in the morning. I don't think that concern would have happened if

Mommy would have been around the house catering to her children all day long."

Child Care. Re-entry women students may find child care arrangements easier to make than do their friends with full-time jobs, for a course schedule can often be made to fit around a child's school hours. In addition, many universities provide on-campus facilities where a child can be left while his or her mother is in class. In an emergency, some mothers have brought older children to campus where they play quietly in the student lounges or watch TV in the student union. For the most part, however, re-entry students with children will need to investigate the varieties of services available in the community. These will include care provided in the family's home, private arrangements with neighbors, and licensed centers. Many communities have organizations which can offer advice on existing facilities.

Even if your school does not have a child care facility, students may be able to babysit during the day or in the late afternoon. Call your local high school placement office for teenagers in your area, or find undergraduates through requests on bulletin boards or an ad in the campus newspaper. Remember that other students may have schedules that permit them to babysit during the times you are in class.

NU NOTE: Northwestern offers no child care facilities. For information on day care in Evanston, contact the Committee for Community Coordinated Child Care at 475-2661. A pamphlet on child care in the area entitled, "Field Study in Early Childhood Socialization Manual," is available at the Center for Urban Affairs, 2046 Sheridan Road, and through Marijean Suelzle in the Department of Sociology at a cost of $8.00.
You can contact babysitters through the Student Placement Office at 492-3707, or you might put an ad in the Daily Northwestern, 492-7206.

Friends and Relatives. Re-entry women find that the amount of time required for study leaves considerably less time to nurture friendships and maintain ties with relatives. Some friends and relatives may be very supportive and helpful, while others may resent or misunderstand newfound academic interests. Beginning a new life often means distancing yourself from old friends, and it takes courage to let go of the ones who can no longer accept you. But remember that one of the exciting benefits of returning to school is making new friends.

Friends. When one woman returned to school, she recalled that her best friend was very upset. "She was jealous. She had not completed her education. I tried to push her along in the same direction, but I think it really piqued her that I had decided to step out a bit. There was a strain and there was no question it came right at that time."

But this particular re-entry student was convinced her decision to return to school was right for her. She remembers telling her friend, "I'm going to do it. I'm going to make the difference; are you going to? Or are you going to live your same old way the rest of your life?"

You may also discover that your return to academic life is part of a growing trend. As one student pointed out, "Most of my women friends my age are back in school or going to work." And she received considerable support from these women in similar circumstances.

A thirty-one year old mother of two says she still manages to see the friends that are important to her, but on a different basis. "We still see each other regularly," she says, "but regularly is different now than it was then. When I was home, we used to see each other a lot. Now it is much more of a structured situation. Someone has a party or a dinner. It is not daily visiting." Because of the new structure of your life, you will have to create the opportunities to meet your friends rather than rely on spontaneous, unscheduled visits.

Another woman recounted her ways of keeping in touch. "I think I have to make an effort," she said. "People will call you so many times and then give up. I send birthday cards and try to call for just a few minutes to the people who are important to me. Now some of them we see as couples instead of so much on my own, but it is an effort." And, some friendships survive oversights and shortages of time. "I haven't called my good friend for a long time," she admits. "I missed her birthday this year, but I know she is understanding and I will call her and send a gift."

Relatives. The attitudes of relatives about a woman's return to school range from very encouraging to downright disapproving. One re-entry woman found opposite reactions within her own family. She says, "My mother thinks it's terrific. My father is not so sure. He's been a little antagonistic." Although she was not sure why her father opposed her return to school, she offered several explanations; "Maybe it's because he's old and doesn't think I need to be doing this. It might be competitive. Maybe it's because it takes time away from him." To cope with relatives of various opinions, many women learn to screen the information they volunteer. They share information about their academic life with relatives who care, and avoid discussion of it with those who do not.

University Life

Selecting Classes. Before arranging your class schedule, get as much information as possible about interesting courses and the professors who offer them. Students who live at the university can pick up information from other students in their dormitories, dining halls, and at social gatherings. But re-entry women, who live off

campus, do not have easy access to these sources; they have discovered that they must establish their own informational networks, based on publications, faculty advice and students' responses.

Publications. Almost all students find the course descriptions in the university catalog out of date or insufficient, and so they look for further information. Many universities have evaluation books published by students to provide their perspective on courses and professors. Look for these valuable resources in university bookstores and libraries.

NU NOTE: The Northwestern Course and Teacher Evaluation Council publishes two books: The CTEC Faculty Review and the CTEC Course Description Book.
The Faculty Review presents the results of student evaluations gathered at the end of a course. It is not currently available for sale, but can be consulted at: The Norris Center Browsing Library (Plaza level), departmental offices, and the Reference Desk on the ground floor of the University Library. Back issues are in the Library Archives.
The Course Description Book includes class syllabi written by the professors themselves describing the course and types of materials and readings to be used. It can be purchased during New Student Week at the Northwestern Student Coop and the Norris Center Bookstore. You can consult the current issue at the University Library Reference Desk. Back issues can be found in the Library Archives.

Faculty Advice. Professors are another good source of information. You might want to phone or visit professors for firsthand knowledge about course content and work requirements. You can also seek advice from departmental advisers. Later, of course, when you have taken courses from professors you liked, you can ask them for recommendations.

NU NOTES: Each department has an undergraduate adviser. You don't have to be a major in that department to consult. There are also academic advisors in the Office of Studies in Rebecca Crown.

When you do declare a major, remember that you are accountable for fulfilling the requirements for graduation, so seek out an advisor right away to make sure you are on the right track. Since requirements may change from year to year, save a copy of the catalog from the year you declare your major; these will be the requirements for which you are accountable.

Many re-entry women emphasized the importance of a formal or informal adviser who suits your needs. So keep looking until you find the right one.

Professors can also be useful in helping to evaluate your past course work. Many re-entry women discover, however, that an old transcript may show a certain level of proficiency, but they are not sure they can still perform at that level, particularly in such fields as math or foreign languages. You can buy inexpensive copies of used textbooks to discover how much you remember or to bone up on what you have forgotten. If you don't feel you are ready for a course, try to find the time to prepare for it before you take it. Perhaps just reading the textbooks on your own will be sufficient. Or you may want the help of a tutor. (Put a note on bulletin boards or ask in the departmental offices to find a tutor.) If even the lowest level courses seem too difficult, you might want to invest in a remedial course. Or you could audit an easy level course before continuing. Some women found it easier to start a new foreign language rather than find themselves in an upper level course when they are no longer prepared.

If you do make a mistake in selecting a class, learn about the options for dropping or adding courses, changing sections, or taking an incomplete. It is important to remember that you are not helpless to remedy a mistake. Faculty and administrators are accustomed to hearing from students with problems and can often suggest solutions you could not find on your own.

NU NOTE: Courses cannot be added or dropped or sections changed after the fifth day of classes. No course may be dropped after the sixth week of classes; if there are extenuating circumstances, however, exceptions may be granted.

Student Responses. After your first quarter, you will know other students to rely on for helpful information in selecting courses. Some of the best advice can come from them. Conversations with other students can provide vital information about the quality of the courses and the work loads involved. Seek out such details from students whenever possible, and be sure to ask other adult students about their opinions. Their judgments may be more like your own likes and dislikes.

Scheduling Classes. Re-entry women cited many reasons for selecting their courses. Some don't want to waste time; they want every class to be a meaningful and exciting experience. At the same time, women try to balance their schedules,weighing course load against other responsibilities. At times these women consider it important to off-set a difficult course with an easy one or take courses with overlapping content so they will not be overloaded.

When making your schedule, you should examine each individual course and also plan a balanced overall schedule that you think you will be able to manage. You will want to consider the practical demands on your time, such as child care and travel time. Many women with young children try to schedule their classes during

school hours. If requirements demand that you attend class early in the morning or after children are out of school, plan your child care arrangements in advance. As other women do, you may be able to count on your husband, or a relative or a neighbor, or a babysitter. (One woman hired a local high school student to feed and dress her child in the morning.) Or you might want to see if the course will be offered at a different time in the future. Some women try to schedule their classes back to back to avoid losing time and energy, while others find intervals between classes a useful time to study on campus.

Consider your own strengths and weaknesses when you select classes so you don't find yourself overburdened. If you have difficulties with math, get advice on selecting a course as close to your level as possible. If you do take a hard course, sign up for it during a quarter when the workload of your other courses will allow enough time for it. If writing is a problem for you, make sure you don't take several courses at the same time which require papers.

Take into account the requirements of each course: the amount and kind of work required, dates when assignments are due (ask professors for syllabi in advance), and exams scheduled. Check these against one another and with your home obligations. One woman, for example, found she had to avoid courses with library work because she could not be away from home that long; another woman invested in copying library materials so she could work on them at home. Of course, you will want to make sure assignments are not all due at the same time and exams are scheduled so you will have sufficient time for study.

Registration. Re-entry students find their first experience with registration to be very trying. There may be some comfort in knowing that students of all ages share this feeling. One re-entry woman described her frustrations: "I found out through mistakes how to fill out those cards. I hated registration. Standing in those lines. I thought it was a big pain in the neck, but you just went and did it."

Registration may be very time-consuming. You might want to ask at the Registrar's Office to get an idea of how long it will take. Schedule enough time for yourself so you won't feel pressured if your plans don't go right.

NU NOTE: For your own comfort, you should plan to be on campus about half a day.

Although the confusion may seem general, you can impose some order on it by carefully reading all instructions beforehand. Look for a board posting any last minute changes as you enter registration. Make sure you check this before standing in line to register. Plan your courses with the help of the published class schedule before you go to to register. Remember that courses listed in the catalog may not

actually be offered. Come prepared with some alternative courses you would like to take should the ones you prefer be closed. If you have such a back-up plan you can save yourself some time and frustration.

NU NOTE: Read the section in the Student Handbook about signatures required for your school. Read the footnotes in the Class Schedule indicating courses that require special permission. Class schedules are available one week before the first day of registration at the Registrar's Office in Rebecca Crown. Check the calendar in it for the entire academic year. You will find it helpful to note dates for registration, exams and holidays in your own datebook at the beginning of the school year. Try to read the student newspaper, the Daily Northwestern, regularly to learn about academic deadlines and campus activities.

If a class you wanted is filled, put your name on the waiting list. It is common for students to change courses during the first week and a spot could open for you. If you desperately need a particular class you might follow the example of one re-entry woman who said she went to see the professor and was able to "talk her way" into his course.

NU NOTE: Waiting lists are kept in the office of the department offering the course. Each department has its own way of regulating waiting lists, so ask for details of the procedure.

Study. Although re-entry women tend to worry about their ability to compete with younger students, experience shows this concern to be unfounded. A professor speaking about one re-entry student said, "She would make the assumption, as many of these women do, that intellectual aging is like body aging. I answer by saying, 'You're going to use your mind, not do the hundred yard dash.' An administrator who has followed the progress of re-entry women within the university confirmed this comment. "All are successful, one is practically straight A and they are all in the B grade range. A couple of them are even in clubs, engaging in extra-curricular activities."

While women complain of difficulty in concentrating and memorizing, they bring a richer life experience to their studies; they have more facility in analyzing and drawing connections and conclusions. As one professor emphasized in speaking of re-entry students, "It was clear that maturity brought insights that booklearning doesn't." Another professor, impressed by the motivation these women demonstrate, concluded, "Their eagerness to learn and pride in the craft of good work helps them soak up knowledge like a sponge."

Finding the time to study. In order to have enough time to study, you may have to follow the example of other re-entry students who had to lengthen their days. Some women find a few extra hours to study

at night, while others prefer the early morning hours before their family is awake. But they have found from experience that work can be scheduled without spending all night writing or studying.

Where to study. Library. Re-entry women have created their own combinations of home and library study and you will come to find the one most efficient for you. Some women prefer to study in the library because there are too many distractions at home -- telephone, housework, children, sometimes even the refrigerator. The library may be a good place to study for exams when you need to concentrate and you don't have a minute to lose for interruptions.

NU NOTE: Graduate students can request a carrel at the library to have your own place to study and leave your books.

Home. Women who prefer to study at home feel they can at least be physically present for their children. They also find it a release from tension to do a few household chores as a break from their studies. If it is difficult to arrange time away from home, consider investing a little money to copy reserve readings so you can read them at your leisure at home.

Women use different rooms in their homes to study -- from kitchen to bedroom to living room. The important thing is to find a place of your own where you can store your books and papers and where you won't be constantly disturbed. You might want to take a break when your children come home from school and give them your undivided attention for a short time before going back to study. And if you are distracted by noise, you can follow one woman's example and buy earplugs.

Learning to study. Many re-entry students find they have to re-learn to study. As one student explained to a thirty-four-year-old woman, "You have to learn how to 'do' college; you have to learn the ropes, learn what to study and what not to study." These are techniques that will come with experiences. As this re-entry woman pointed out, "The first paper you write, if you haven't written one in fifteen years, is going to be harder than the fifth."

You will, of course, learn the ropes yourself in time, but you may find the experiences of other re-entry women helpful in getting a start. For example, one woman described her son's suggestion for study which worked well for her. "What helped me was that my son had given me some advice. It worked beautifully. I followed it to the letter. When you go to the library, find one place that you want to study. Don't do anything else there. When you're through with a course go immediately to that spot. Go over your notes right then when they are fresh and be sure they are all set before you do anything. If you want to relax and you go to the library, go to a different spot. That's where you read your light materials or something for yourself. If you confuse the two spots, you are going to forget when you're tired and do one thing when you really mean to be doing the other.

If you really think of the one as being your study spot and go there at particular times in your schedule, you're going to make yourself study when you're too tired to think and you'll do it anyway." In addition, you might want to read over your notes before going into class to refresh your memory.

Another woman described how she learned to get by when she was pressed for time. "I learned to skimp on my reading, a thing I deplore and despise doing. I learned it out of desperation when I had to read a book by the next day and I simply didn't have time. I would resort to things like reading summaries of chapters or even the first paragraph of each chapter and the first line of each paragraph, just so I would have some idea of what the thing was about. It worked in cases where we were just going to discuss some material in class." This method of skimming (reading the introduction, headings and titles, the first line of every paragraph and the conclusion) can also be useful in providing an initial overview of the material. You will then have a meaningful framework when you go back to read in detail.

Because of your other obligations, last minute cramming may be difficult. So don't procrastinate. Start your assignments well in advance of the date they are due. A mother of two children gave an example from her experience. "I usually work ahead. You know when papers are due. The first week of school, for this twenty page paper which I had to hand in the Monday after Thanksgiving break, I had all the references all set." She wrote the paper before Thanksgiving and said, "All I had to do is re-read it and proof it for the third time over Thanksgiving and give it to a typist." And she added a time-saving tip she had adopted. "I won't do my own typing. It takes me too long and I am not good at it. I'd rather have someone else do it and I'll have the free time."

Re-entry women, like all students, learn to count on the services and advice of other people to improve their performance. You might want to find someone to read and edit your papers at first before you hand them in. And don't be afraid to ask questions. Consult your teaching assistants and professors whenever you are in doubt. If one professor gives you a curt answer or you feel rebuffed, wait for another occasion to try again. If nothing seems to work to get assistance from one source, try another.

University campuses have a wealth of resources to help you with your studies, so learn to seek them out if you need special assistance. Look for remedial classes if your skills are rusty. Or find yourself a tutor. There are also numerous books to help you. For example, to improve your writing skills, consult: The Elements of Style by William Strunk and E.B. White published by MacMillan or The Student's Guide for Writing College Papers by Kate L. Turabian, University of Chicago Press. Ask you professors for other study guides in their particular fields.

NU NOTE: The services of the Writing Place in the School of Education are available to all students. Staff will go over papers with you and help with such things as outlines and structure.

Student Lounges. If you are looking for places to study or relax between classes, you can probably find many alternatives to the library. Look for student lounges and vending machines in classroom buildings and the student union. You may even be able to find sleeping rooms where you can stretch out and rest.

NU NOTE: Here are a few examples of the places available at Northwestern:
School of Education: 2003 Sheridan Road (Second floor)
Kresge: 1859 Sheridan Road (Large room in the basement)
Norris Center: 1999 Sheridan Road (On lakefill)
Tech Library: 2233 Sheridan Road (Floor vending machines)
Sleeping Rooms: (Vinyl covered cots with attached pillows are available in Norris Center restrooms in the basement and on the second floor) and in the University Library restrooms on levels three, four and five.

Bookstores. The university bookstore is usually not the only store selling course materials. Ask other students about stores in the area. There are usually several places where you can buy used texts, but be sure you're getting the edition currently assigned. If you are having trouble locating a book, call ahead to save time. And remember that most professors put at least one copy of all assigned books on reserve in the library. Many students find that it's not a good idea to buy your books before you go to a class for the first time. Last minute assignment changes may affect what you need to buy.

NU NOTE: The following is a list of some of the bookstores serving the university community:
Chandler's: 630 Davis 475-7200
Co-op: 1726 Orrington 475-2600
Great Expectations: 911 Foster 864-3881
Kroch and Brentano's: 1711 Sherman 328-7220
Logos : 601 Davis 328-4889
Norris Center: 1999 Sheridan (Lakefill) 864-6700
SBX: 1737 Sherman 328-2717

Career Counseling. Almost all colleges and universities maintain offices offering professional help in choosing and planning a career. It's very important to consult these services early in your education to be sure there really are jobs in the area you're interested in and that you're getting the right education to be placed in them upon graduation. These offices may refer you elsewhere in the university for specific help, but they are always a good place to begin. You can certainly benefit by learning to use the resource material available.

NU NOTE: The Guidance and Counseling Office in Scott Hall offers educational, career, and personal counseling free of charge to all Northwestern students. You can make an appointment to see a counselor by calling 492-7340; walk-ins can usually be accommodated. All conversations are held in confidence.

Career counseling offices usually house catalogs from other universities (though you may also find them in the library), literature about many occupations, and information about graduate programs. They may also offer testing to help you discover new information about your interests and aptitudes. This may also be the office to find information about standardized tests for graduate and professional schools: the GMAT, LSAT, GRE, and MCAT.

NU NOTE: Guidance and Counseling uses the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory to help students clarify their educational and occupational plans. The "Post Graduate Plans Survey of Graduating Seniors" will tell you what last year's seniors in every department were doing immediately after graduation.

Financial Aid. If you are in need of financial assistance to complete your education, do not hesitate to go to the financial aid office to request information of scholarships and loans. Women who felt they did not have sufficient resources to finance their education or were reluctant to use family funds took out loans through the university with no interest due until completion of school. You might also want to check with your own bank.

Re-entry women often do not realize that allowance is made for education costs of children in private and parochial schools. The total income and total financial resources of the family are taken into consideration in assessing a family's ability to pay for a wife's education.

NU NOTE: Northwestern's Financial Aid office is in Rebecca Crown, and their phone number is 492-7400. This is also the office to consult about work-study jobs if you are eligible.

Discrimination. Sex discrimination is illegal in education institutions receiving federal funding. Universities are eager to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 which reads:

> No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

If you feel you have been the victim of discrimination, document your case, keeping notes of all details such as place, time, and substance of any conversation, exactly as possible, and names of witnesses. You might want to begin by discussing the situation informally with the head of your department or a professor or administrator you know.

If you wish to make further inquiry or file a formal complaint, you should see the university's EEO officer.

NU NOTE: Northwestern has a Human Relations Committee which functions as an ombudsman channeling inquiries, reports, and grievances to the appropriate existing officer. And it has an EEO officer.

Relationships with Students and Faculty. Although re-entry women are older than the majority of students and sometimes closer in age to their professors, they do not experience much difficulty fitting in. One older woman noticed that in a new class there was usually an empty seat on either side of her for about the first week. After that, she said, she just blended in with the others.

As another woman discovered, "Age is really not a problem. There are like-minded people at all ages." If you are interested, you can develop working relationships and friendships with the younger students, as the experience of a thirty-five-year-old student illustrates: "When I missed a class or two they were willing to give me their notes. They'd say, 'Let's go do our homework together and make sure it's right.' I worked with one student on statistics together and we became really good friends. That was kind of fun. I enjoyed that." And she sums up, "The opportunity is there if you want it."

Another woman found her friendships with students taking on a different aspect: "I'm usually taken for younger than I am and when they find out I have two teenagers it shakes up their ideas about age. Sometimes I was given the role of mother and this was comforting to me because I knew how to handle that."

In addition, being around younger students can be an enriching experience. One woman says, "I'm probably better able to understand the children at home because of my exposure to the openness here."

You might find it valuable to seek out other re-entry women. It can be very encouraging to talk with other women who have similar experiences and interests. Many re-entry women mention the importance of the mutual understanding and support derived from other students their age. One describes her experience with her peers, saying, "Knowing older students made it sort of easier. It's kind of a soothing thing. You have someone to talk about common problems with."

Professors. In general, re-entry women find age is a positive factor in relating to faculty members. As one thirty-five-year-old mother of three points out, "I think there is a different relationship with professors since I'm around their age or very close to it. I'm not intimidated by professors. I'm not afraid to speak to them on an equal basis."

However, it is possible that professors will be uneasy or feel threatened around students their own age or older. Be realistic: don't take it too personally and find other more compatible professors. Ask other students to help you find amenable faculty.

Re-entry women emphasize the value of relationships they have established with professors who have taken the time to advise and assist them in their academic work. They know the most up-to-date information about research and careers in their fields and they can provide entré into professional networks. So be sure to go to see your professors to discuss your projects and plans. Such contacts may also prove useful in the future for recommendations for entering graduate school or the job market.

As one professor explained, these relationships are mutually beneficial. Speaking of re-entry women, she said, "Their experience always helps educate me. They serve to bring one part of the real world back to the university and that is something I value."

Making the System Work for You

The university is designed to serve its students, although this may not always seem clear when you are faced with its bureaucracy. Experienced students therefore emphasize the importance of learning the system so you can make it work to your advantage. They say you must learn to persevere until you get what you want.

The advice of other students is invaluable in learning the ropes. If you have a problem, don't hesitate to ask them how they handled situations similar to yours. What you want to do may be fully within the rules and regulations of the university if you only knew them. Sympathetic professors can also give you advice. And, of course, you should read the catalog to find out about waiving requirements, petitioning, and incompletes. Procedures often exist to solve problem situations, so feel free to take advantage of them.

Women also discover that rules require interpretations. For many a rule which appeared hard and fast, there were often instances when re-entry students could point out exceptions. So if you don't like the first answer you receive, ask someone else. Don't give up on the first try. Persist until you have exhausted all possible channels or get the decision you want (and then get it in writing).

On dealing with professors don't be afraid to ask for special favors. Many re-entry women handicap themselves by their reluctance to seek out privileges. They sometimes feel as if they are present on suffrance and so dare not ask any further favors. Or they feel intimidated by the academy and neglect the extent to which members of this bureaucracy can--and wish to--be helpful. Younger students certainly don't hesitate to ask to bend the rules, so there is no reason you shouldn't have the same rights. If you do have a legitimate excuse for not completing an assignment on time or you have a conflict with an exam date, at least discuss the problem with your professor.

Have I Made the Right Decision? With the many difficulties entailed in leading a double life, re-entry women do tend to stop occasionally and ask themselves if it's worth it. It is a question you may also ask yourself from time to time.

How do other re-entry students answer this question? They will point to the confidence they have gained in themselves and the increased respect they receive from others as some of the benefits garnered from their education. But they will also mention the exhilaration derived from the learning process itself. A thirty-five-year-old re-entry student who has three children describes her feelings. "I think of myself more positively. I can feel myself developing. It's so exciting to experience an education." She may be only half joking when she says that her head has expanded so much from her newly acquired knowledge that it won't fit on her pillow at night. Another woman explains why her education is important to her at her age: "It's growing older but in a good way, feeling good about it."

And when graduation nears, re-entry women also focus on the benefits of a degree to provide expanded career opportunities and increased earning potential. So, the answer they give is "yes, it is worth it."

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